

## Jude Rae

Australian, b. 1956

### Clerambault's Dream

1994, oil on canvas, 180x120 cm

Purchased 1995

Reproduced courtesy of Jude Rae



#### About the work

This realistically painted image of fabric is an example of illusionist realism. Its title and inspiration come from the strange obsession of the eminent French psychiatrist, G. G. de Clerambault (1872-1934), who worked in the field of psychosis and also had a fascination for fabric. He owned several wax mannequins over which he draped rare and exotic materials, then photographed them over and over again, enjoying the idea of a human body concealed beneath the cloth.

Rae's painting shows nothing but fabric, yet suggests much more. Cloth is rich in associations of domesticity and femininity, but also has historical links with magic and mythology as in the Greek legends of the weaving of Ariadne and Penelope. Made and used by people, material comes complete with a long physical memory of being woven, folded and arranged. Rae's folds reverberate with the insistent intimacy of cloth against skin, evoking the hem of a skirt, bandages, curtains, shrouds, sheets and veils. Her painted drapery simultaneously suggests and conceals a human presence, acting as a secretive and erotic screen.

*Clerambault's Dream* takes its style from traditional, academic representations of drapery found in Old Master paintings. However, here the contemporary artist's use of illusionist realism has a quite different focus and takes its influences from the realist paintings of artists like Richard Estes (b.1936), Don Eddy (b.1944) or Franz Gertsch (b.1930) who all manipulate realism in order to explore ideas about art and life beyond surface reality.

Drapery has been a recurring theme in Rae's work, and she often uses it to challenge established artistic conventions. The depiction of fabric was traditionally used as an opportunity to show off an artist's virtuosity and skill. The drapery itself was considered to be of minor importance and was regarded

merely as decorative embellishment. In contrast, Rae focuses entirely on the material, rejecting its historical status as just a beautiful background.

As Peter Simpson, in a review in *The Press* of Christchurch (October 1992) said of Rae's painting, that it presented an opportunity for the 'interplay between the mind and the eye', and this work raises some interesting questions about the presence or absence of the human body and about the presence or absence of subject matter in contemporary painting.

Rae shows considerable technical skill in depicting the folds and the warp and weave of the fabric, modelled realistically in light and shade and capturing the play of light across the plain white surface. Seen initially as a very obvious and simple subject, illusionism is being used as a vehicle for a contemporary intellectual debate.

"I have used images of fabric to suggest surfaces or membranes, screens which both attract and repel the gaze. Cloth falls in infinity of folds, temporary, insubstantial forms, which suggest indefinite extension and variation. I find I am increasingly interested in the relationship between the particular and the general, the ambiguous and the equivocal." (*Prospect Canterbury*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery leaflet, 1992)

Inviting us to look more closely, the limited palette and attention to detail exaggerate the precise simplicity of *Clerambault's Dream*, ultimately imbuing the subject with life. On examination, the realism reveals a carefully balanced composition of rhythmic forms arranged to create and preserve a sense of unity and completeness within itself.

*Clerambault's Dream* was painted as a culmination of Rae's intense study of fabric that had begun in the early 1990s.

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## About the artist

Jude Rae was born in Sydney in 1956. She graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1980, adding a Graduate Diploma from the City Art Institute of New South Wales in 1984. Rae began exhibiting in Australia in 1984. She took part in an Artist Residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts, France, as part of the Australia Council Paris Residency in 1988.

Rae moved to Christchurch in 1990 and attained her Master of Fine Arts from the University of Canterbury in 1992. She was awarded a Creative Projects Grant by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council in 1990 and a Professional Development Grant in 1992. From 1991 to 1993 she was the Director of the South Island Arts Project initiative, based in Christchurch.

Prior to *Clerambault's Dream*, Rae's studies incorporated panels of modernist grids and text with studies of twisted and folded luminous white cloth. The black and white grids in these works worked as a focussing and framing device for the central canvas. She then produced a series of work that concentrated entirely on the depiction of fabric, *Arras* (1994) and *Nexus I* (1994). *Clerambault's Dream* was painted during this period of intense analysis of the psychological, corporeal and metaphorical implications of fabric.

Since 1996 Rae has produced a series of still life studies of china, glassware, bottles and books.

## Other works by the artist in the Collection

There are currently no other works by the artist in the Collection.

## Further reading

'Ways of looking at the art of Jude Rae', Ruth Watson, *Art New Zealand*, No. 75, 1995, pp. 78-79.

*Openings*, Jon Bywater, Jonathan Jensen Gallery, 1994.

*'Unruly Practices', Alter/Image, Feminism and representation in New Zealand art 1973-1993*, C. Barton & D. Lawler-Dormer, City Gallery Wellington, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1993.

*'Corpus in absentia', Shadow of Style*, Deborah Lawler-Dormer, Wellington City Art Gallery, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1992

